

Frederick Engels

Condition of the Working Class in England

1845

Labour Movements

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It must be admitted, even if I had not proved it so often in detail, that the English workers cannot feel happy in this condition; that theirs is not a state in which a man or a whole class of men can think, feel, and live as human beings. The workers must therefore strive to escape from this brutalising condition, to secure for themselves a better, more human position; and this they cannot do without attacking the interest of the bourgeoisie which consists in exploiting them. But the bourgeoisie defends its interests with all the power placed at its disposal by wealth and the might of the State. In proportion as the working-man determines to alter the present state of things, the bourgeois becomes his avowed enemy.

Moreover, the working-man is made to feel at every moment that the bourgeoisie treats him as a chattel, as its property, and for this reason, if for no other, he must come forward as its enemy. I have shown in a hundred ways in the foregoing pages, and could have shown in a hundred others, that, in our present society, he can save his manhood only in hatred and rebellion against the bourgeoisie. And he can protest with most violent passion against the tyranny of the propertied class, thanks to his education, or rather want of education, and to the abundance of hot Irish blood that flows in the veins of the English working-class. The English working-man is no Englishman nowadays; no calculating money-grubber like his wealthy neighbour. He possesses more fully developed feelings, his native northern coldness is overborne by the unrestrained development of his passions and their control over him. The cultivation of the understanding which so greatly strengthens the selfish tendency of the English bourgeois, which has made selfishness his predominant trait and concentrated all his emotional power upon the single point of money-greed, is wanting in the working-man, whose passions are therefore strong and mighty as those of the foreigner. English nationality is annihilated in the working-man.

Since, as we have seen, no single field for the exercise of his manhood is left him, save his opposition to the whole conditions of his life, it is natural that exactly in this opposition he should be most manly, noblest, most worthy of sympathy. We shall see that all the energy, all the activity of the working-men is directed to this point, and that even their attempts to attain general education all stand in direct connection with this. True, we shall have single acts of violence and even of

brutality to report, but it must always be kept in mind that the social war is avowedly raging in England; and that, whereas it is in the interest of the bourgeoisie to conduct this war hypocritically, under the disguise of peace and even of philanthropy, the only help for the working-men consists in laying bare the true state of things and destroying this hypocrisy; that the most violent attacks of the workers upon the bourgeoisie and its servants are only the open, undisguised expression of that which the bourgeoisie perpetrates secretly, treacherously against the workers.

The revolt of the workers began soon after the first industrial development, and has passed through several phases. The investigation of their importance in the history of the English people I must reserve for separate treatment, limiting myself meanwhile to such bare facts as serve to characterise the condition of the English proletariat.

The earliest, crudest, and least fruitful form of this rebellion was that of crime. The working-man lived in poverty and want, and saw that others were better off than he. It was not clear to his mind why he, who did more for society than the rich idler, should be the one to suffer under these conditions. Want conquered his inherited respect for the sacredness of property, and he stole. We have seen how crime increased with the extension of manufacture; how the yearly number of arrests bore a constant relation to the number of bales of cotton annually consumed.

The workers soon realised that crime did not help matters. The criminal could protest against the existing order of society only singly, as one individual; the whole might of society was brought to bear upon each criminal, and crushed him with its immense superiority. Besides, theft was the most primitive form of protest, and for this reason, if for no other, it never became the universal expression of the public opinion of the working-men, however much they might approve of it in silence. As a class, they first manifested opposition to the bourgeoisie when they resisted the introduction of machinery at the very beginning of the industrial period. The first inventors, Arkwright and others, were persecuted in this way and their machines destroyed. Later, there took place a number of revolts against machinery, in which the occurrences were almost precisely the same as those of the printers' disturbances in Bohemia in 1844; factories were demolished and machinery destroyed.

This form of opposition also was isolated, restricted to certain localities, and directed against one feature only of our present social arrangements. When the momentary end was attained, the whole weight of social power fell upon the unprotected evil-doers and punished them to its heart's content, while the

machinery was introduced none the less. A new form of opposition had to be found.

At this point help came in the shape of a law enacted by the old, unreformed, oligarchic-Tory Parliament, a law which never could have passed the House of Commons later, when the Reform Bill had legally sanctioned the distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and made the bourgeoisie the ruling class. This was enacted in 1824, and repealed all laws by which coalitions between working-men for labour purposes had hitherto been forbidden. The working-men obtained a right previously restricted to the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, the right of free association. Secret coalitions had, it is true, previously existed, but could never achieve great results. In Glasgow as Symons relates, a general strike of weavers had taken place in 1812, which was brought about by a secret association. It was repeated in 1822, and on this occasion vitriol was thrown into the faces of the two working-men who would not join the association, and were therefore regarded by the members as traitors to their class. Both the assaulted lost the use of their eyes in consequence of the injury. So, too, in 1818, the association of Scottish miners was powerful enough to carry on a general strike. These associations required their members to take an oath of fidelity and secrecy, had regular lists, treasurers, book-keepers, and local branches. But the secrecy with which everything was conducted crippled their growth. When, on the other hand, the working-men received in 1824 the right of free association, these combinations were very soon spread over all England and attained great power. In all branches of industry Trades Unions were formed with the outspoken intention of protecting the single working-man against the tyranny and neglect of the bourgeoisie. Their objects were to deal, en masse, as a power, with the employers; to regulate the rate of wages according to the profit of the latter, to raise it when opportunity offered, and to keep it uniform in each trade throughout the country. Hence they tried to settle with the capitalists a scale of wages to be universally adhered to, and ordered out on strike the employees of such individuals as refused to accept the scale. They aimed further to keep up the demand for labour by limiting the number of apprentices, and so to keep wages high; to counteract, as far as possible, the indirect wage reductions which the manufacturers brought about by means of new tools and machinery; and finally, to assist unemployed working-men financially. This they do either directly or by means of a card to legitimate the bearer as a "society man," and with which the working-man wanders from place to place, supported by his fellow-workers, and instructed as to the best opportunity for finding employment. This is tramping, and the wanderer a tramp. To attain these ends, a President and Secretary are engaged at a salary (since it is to be expected that no manufacturer will employ such persons), and a committee collects the weekly contributions and watches over their expenditure for the purposes of the association. When it proved possible and

advantageous, the various trades of single districts united in a federation and held delegate conventions at set times. The attempt has been made in single cases to unite the workers of one branch over all England in one great Union; and several times (in 1830 for the first time) to form one universal trades association for the whole United Kingdom, with a separate organisation for each trade. These associations, however, never held together long, and were seldom realised even for the moment, since an exceptionally universal excitement is necessary to make such a federation possible and effective.

The means usually employed by these Unions for attaining their ends are the following: If one or more employers refuse to pay the wage specified by the Union, a deputation is sent or a petition forwarded (the working-men, you see, know how to recognise the absolute power of the lord of the factory in his little State); if this proves unavailing, the Union commands the employees to stop work, and all hands go home. This strike is either partial when one or several, or general when all employers in the trade refuse to regulate wages according to the proposals of the Union. So far go the lawful means of the Union, assuming the strike to take effect after the expiration of the legal notice, which is not always the case. But these lawful means are very weak when there are workers outside the Union, or when members separate from it for the sake of the momentary advantage offered by the bourgeoisie. Especially in the case of partial strikes can the manufacturer readily secure recruits from these black sheep (who are known as knobsticks), and render fruitless the efforts of the united workers. Knobsticks are usually threatened, insulted, beaten, or otherwise maltreated by the members of the Union; intimidated, in short, in every way. Prosecution follows, and as the law-abiding bourgeoisie has the power in its own hands, the force of the Union is broken almost every time by the first unlawful act, the first judicial procedure against its members.

The history of these Unions is a long series of defeats of the working-men, interrupted by a few isolated victories. All these efforts naturally cannot alter the economic law according to which wages are determined by the relation between supply and demand in the labour market. Hence the Unions remain powerless against all great forces which influence this relation. In a commercial crisis the Union itself must reduce wages or dissolve wholly; and in a time of considerable increase in the demand for labour, it cannot fix the rate of wages higher than would be reached spontaneously by the competition of the capitalists among themselves. But in dealing with minor, single influences they are powerful. If the employer had no concentrated, collective opposition to expect, he would in his own interest gradually reduce wages to a lower and lower point; indeed, the battle of competition which he has to wage against his fellow-manufacturers would force him to do so, and wages would soon reach the minimum. But this competition of

the manufacturers among themselves is, under average conditions, somewhat restricted by the opposition of the working-men.

Every manufacturer knows that the consequence of a reduction not justified by conditions to which his competitors also are subjected, would be a strike, which would most certainly injure him, because his capital would be idle as long as the strike lasted, and his machinery would be rusting, whereas it is very doubtful whether he could, in such a case, enforce his reduction. Then he has the certainty that if he should succeed, his competitors would follow him, reducing the price of the goods so produced, and thus depriving him of the benefit of his policy. Then, too, the Unions often bring about a more rapid increase of wages after a crisis than would otherwise follow. For the manufacturer's interest is to delay raising wages until forced by competition, but now the working-men demand an increased wage as soon as the market improves, and they can carry their point by reason of the smaller supply of workers at his command under such circumstances. But, for resistance to more considerable forces which influence the labour market, the Unions are powerless. In such cases hunger gradually drives the strikers to resume work on any terms, and when once a few have begun, the force of the Union is broken, because these few knobsticks, with the reserve supplies of goods in the market, enable the bourgeoisie to overcome the worst effects of the interruption of business. The funds of the Union are soon exhausted by the great numbers requiring relief, the credit which the shopkeepers give at high interest is withdrawn after a time, and want compels the working-man to place himself once more under the yoke of the bourgeoisie. But strikes end disastrously for the workers mostly, because the manufacturers, in their own interest (which has, be it said, become their interest only through the resistance of the workers), are obliged to avoid all useless reductions, while the workers feel in every reduction imposed by the state of trade a deterioration of their condition, against which they must defend themselves as far as in them lies.

It will be asked, "Why, then, do the workers strike in such cases, when the uselessness of such measures is so evident?" Simply because they must protest against every reduction, even if dictated by necessity; because they feel bound to proclaim that they, as human beings, shall not be made to bow to social circumstances, but social conditions ought to yield to them as human beings; because silence on their part would be a recognition of these social conditions, an admission of the right of the bourgeoisie to exploit the workers in good times and let them starve in bad ones. Against this the working-men must rebel so long as they have not lost all human feeling, and that they protest in this way and no other, comes of their 'being practical English people, who express themselves in action, and do not, like German theorists, go to sleep as soon as their protest is properly

registered and placed ad acta, there to sleep as quietly as the protesters themselves. The active resistance of the English working-men has its effect in holding the money-greed of the bourgeoisie within certain limits, and keeping alive the opposition of the workers to the social and political omnipotence of the bourgeoisie, while it compels the admission that something more is needed than Trades Unions and strikes to break the power of the ruling class. But what gives these Unions and the strikes arising from them their real importance is this, that they are the first attempt of the workers to abolish competition. They imply the recognition of the fact that the supremacy of the bourgeoisie is based wholly upon the competition of the workers among themselves; i.e., upon their want of cohesion. And precisely because the Unions direct themselves against the vital nerve of the present social order, however one-sidedly, in however narrow a way, are they so dangerous to this social order. The working-men cannot attack the bourgeoisie, and with it the whole existing order of society, at any sorer point than this. If the competition of the workers among themselves is destroyed, if all determine not to be further exploited by the bourgeoisie, the rule of property is at an end. Wages depend upon the relation of demand to supply, upon the accidental state of the labour market, simply because the workers have hitherto been content to be treated as chattels, to be bought and sold. The moment the workers resolve to be bought and sold no longer, when, in the determination of the value of labour, they take the part of men possessed of a will as well as of working-power, at that moment the whole Political Economy of today is at an end.

The laws determining the rate of wages would, indeed, come into force again in the long run, if the working-men did not go beyond this step of abolishing competition among themselves. But they must go beyond that unless they are prepared to recede again and to allow competition among themselves to reappear. Thus once advanced so far, necessity compels them to go farther; to abolish not only one kind of competition, but competition itself altogether, and that they will do.

The workers are coming to perceive more clearly with every day how competition affects them; they see far more clearly than the bourgeois that competition of the capitalists among themselves presses upon the workers too, by bringing on commercial crises, and that this kind of competition, too, must be abolished. They will soon learn how they have to go about it.

That these Unions contribute greatly to nourish the bitter hatred of the workers against the property-holding class need hardly be said. From them proceed, therefore, with or without the connivance of the leading members, in times of unusual excitement, individual actions which can be explained only by hatred wrought to the pitch of despair, by a wild passion overwhelming all restraints. Of

this sort are the attacks with vitriol mentioned in the foregoing pages, and a series of others, of which I shall cite several. In 1831, during a violent labour movement, young Ashton, a manufacturer in Hyde, near Manchester, was shot one evening when crossing a field, and no trace of the assassin discovered. There is no doubt that this was a deed of vengeance of the working-men. Incendiarisms and attempted explosions are very common. On Friday, September 29th, 1845, an attempt was made to blow up the saw-works of Padgin, in Howard Street, Sheffield. A closed iron tube filled with powder was the means employed, and the damage was considerable. On the following day, a similar attempt was made in Ibbetson's knife and file works at Shales Moor, near Sheffield. Mr. Ibbetson had made himself obnoxious by an active participation in bourgeois movements, by low wages, the exclusive employment of knobsticks, and the exploitation of the Poor Law for his own benefit. He had reported, during the crisis of 1842, such operatives as refused to accept reduced wages, as persons who could find work but would not take it, and were, therefore, not deserving of relief, so compelling the acceptance of a reduction. Considerable damage was inflicted by the explosion, and all the working-men who came to view it regretted only "that the whole concern was not blown into the air." On Friday, October 6th, 1843, an attempt to set fire to the factory of Ainsworth and Crompton, at Bolton, did no damage; it was the third or fourth attempt in the same factory within a very short time. In the meeting of the Town Council of Sheffield, on Wednesday, January 10th, 1844, the Commissioner of Police exhibited a cast-iron machine, made for the express purpose of producing an explosion, and found filled with four pounds of powder, and a fuse which had been lighted but had not taken effect, in the works of Mr. Kitchen, Earl Street, Sheffield. On Sunday, January 21st, 1844, an explosion caused by a package of powder took place in the sawmill of Bentley & White, at Bury, in Lancashire, and produced considerable damage. On Thursday, February 1st, 1844, the Soho Wheel Works, in Sheffield, were set on fire and burnt up.

Here are six such cases in four months, all of which have their sole origin in the embitterment of the working-men against the employers. What sort of a social state it must be in which such things are possible I need hardly say. These facts are proof enough that in England, even in good business years, such as 1843, the social war is avowed and openly carried on, and still the English bourgeoisie does not stop to reflect! But the case which speaks most loudly is that of the Glasgow Thugs, which came up before the Assizes from the 3rd to the 11th of January, 1838. It appears from the proceedings that the Cotton-Spinners' Union, which existed here from the year 1816, possessed rare organisation and power. The members were bound by an oath to adhere to the decision of the majority, and had during every turnout a secret committee which was unknown to the mass of the members, and controlled the funds of the Union absolutely. This committee fixed a price upon the

heads of knobsticks and obnoxious manufacturers and upon incendiarisms in mills. A mill was thus set on fire in which female knobsticks were employed in spinning in the place of men; a Mrs. M'Pherson, mother of one of these girls, was murdered, and both murderers sent to America at the expense of the association. As early as 1820, a knobstick named M'Quarry was shot at and wounded, for which deed the doer received twenty pounds from the Union, but was discovered and transported for life. Finally, in 1837, in May, disturbances occurred in consequence of a turnout in the Oatbank and Mile End factories, in which perhaps a dozen knobsticks were maltreated. In July, of the same year, the disturbances still continued, and a certain Smith, a knobstick, was so maltreated that he died. The committee was now arrested, an investigation begun, and the leading members found guilty of participation in conspiracies, maltreatment of knobsticks, and incendiarism in the mill of James and Francis Wood, and they were transported for seven years. What do our good Germans say to this story? [1]

The property-holding class, and especially the manufacturing portion of it which comes into direct contact with the working-men, declaims with the greatest violence against these Unions, and is constantly trying to prove their uselessness to the working-men upon grounds which are economically perfectly correct, but for that very reason partially mistaken, and for the working-man's understanding totally without effect. The very zeal of the bourgeoisie shows that it is not disinterested in the matter; and apart from the direct loss involved in a turnout, the state of the case is such that whatever goes into the pockets of the manufacturers comes of necessity out of those of the worker. So that even if the working-men did not know that the Unions hold the emulation of their masters in the reduction of wages, at least in a measure, in check, they would still stand by the Unions, simply to the injury of their enemies, the manufacturers. In war the injury of one party is the benefit of the other, and since the working-men are on a war footing towards their employers, they do merely what the great potentates do when they get into a quarrel. Beyond all other bourgeois is our friend Dr. Ure, the most furious enemy of the Unions. He foams with indignation at the "secret tribunals" of the cotton-spinners, the most powerful section of the workers, tribunals which boast their ability to paralyse every disobedient manufacturer, "and so bring ruin on the man who had given them profitable employment for many a year." He speaks of a time "when the inventive head and the sustaining heart of trade were held in bondage by the unruly lower members." A pity that the English working-men will not let themselves be pacified so easily with thy fable as the Roman Plebs, thou modern Menenius Agrippa! Finally, he relates the following: At one time the coarse mule-spinners had misused their power beyond all endurance. High wages, instead of awakening thankfulness towards the manufacturers and leading to intellectual improvement (in harmless study of sciences useful to the bourgeoisie, of course), in

many cases produced pride and supplied funds for supporting rebellious spirits in strikes, with which a number of manufacturers were visited one after the other in a purely arbitrary manner. During an unhappy disturbance of this sort in Hyde, Dukinfield, and the surrounding neighbourhood, the manufacturers of the district, anxious lest they should be driven from the market by the French, Belgians, and Americans, addressed themselves to the machine-works of Sharp, Roberts & Co., and requested Mr. Sharp to turn his inventive mind to the construction of an automatic mule in order “to emancipate the trade from galling slavery and impending ruin.”

“He produced in the course of a few months, a machine apparently instinct with the thought, feeling, and tact of the experienced workman – which even in its infancy displayed a new principle of regulation, ready in its mature state to fulfil the functions of a finished spinner. Thus, the Iron Man, as the operatives fitly call it, sprang out of the hands of our modern Prometheus at the bidding of Minerva – a creation destined to restore order among the industrious classes, and to confirm to Great Britain the empire of art. The news of this Herculean prodigy spread dismay through the Union, and even long before it left its cradle, so to speak, it strangled the Hydra of misrule.”

Ure proves further that the invention of the machine, with which four and five colours are printed at once, was a result of the disturbances among the calico printers; that the refractoriness of the yarn-dressers in the power-loom weaving mills gave rise to a new and perfected machine for warp-dressing, and mentions several other such cases. A few pages earlier this same Ure gives himself a great deal of trouble to prove in detail that machinery is beneficial to the workers! But Ure is not the only one; in the Factory Report, Mr. Ashworth, the manufacturer, and many another, lose no opportunity to express their wrath against the Unions. These wise bourgeois, like certain governments, trace every movement which they do not understand to the influence of ill-intentioned agitators, demagogues, traitors, spouting idiots, and ill-balanced youth. They declare that the paid agents of the Unions are interested in the agitation because they live upon it, as though the necessity for this payment were not forced upon them by the bourgeois, who will give such men no employment!

The incredible frequency of these strikes proves best of all to what extent the social war has broken out all over England. No week passes, scarcely a day, indeed, in which there is not a strike in some direction, now against a reduction, then against a refusal to raise the rate of wages, again by reason of the employment of knobsticks or the continuance of abuses, sometimes against new machinery, or for a hundred other reasons. These strikes, at first skirmishes, sometimes result in

weighty struggles; they decide nothing, it is true, but they are the strongest proof that the decisive battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is approaching. They are the military school of the working-men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided; they are the pronunciamientos of single branches of industry that these too have joined the labour movement. And when one examines a year's file of the Northern Star, the only sheet which reports all the movements of the proletariat, one finds that all the proletarians of the towns and of country manufacture have united in associations, and have protested from time to time, by means of a general strike, against the supremacy of the bourgeoisie. And as schools of war, the Unions are unexcelled. In them is developed the peculiar courage of the English. It is said on the Continent that the English, and especially the working-men, are cowardly, that they cannot carry out a revolution because, unlike the French, they do not riot at intervals, because they apparently accept the bourgeois regime so quietly. This is a complete mistake. The English working-men are second to none in courage; they are quite as restless as the French, but they fight differently. The French, who are by nature political, struggle against social evils with political weapons; the English, for whom politics exist only as a matter of interest, solely in the interest of bourgeois society, fight, not against the Government, but directly against the bourgeoisie; and for the time, this can be done only in a peaceful manner. Stagnation in business, and the want consequent upon it, engendered the revolt at Lyons, in 1834, in favour of the Republic: in 1842, at Manchester, a similar cause gave rise to a universal turnout for the Charter and higher wages. That courage is required for a turnout, often indeed much loftier courage, much bolder, firmer determination than for an insurrection, is self-evident. It is, in truth, no trifle for a working-man who knows want from experience, to face it with wife and children, to endure hunger and wretchedness for months together, and stand firm and unshaken through it all. What is death, what the galleys which await the French revolutionist, in comparison with gradual starvation, with the daily sight of a starving family, with the certainty of future revenge on the part of the bourgeoisie, all of which the English working-man chooses in preference to subjection under the yoke of the property-holding class? We shall meet later an example of this obstinate, unconquerable courage of men who surrender to force only when all resistance would be aimless and unmeaning. And precisely in this quiet perseverance, in this lasting determination which undergoes a hundred tests every day, the English working-man develops that side of his character which commands most respect. People who endure so much to bend one single bourgeois will be able to break the power of the whole bourgeoisie.

But apart from that, the English working-man has proved his courage often enough. That the turnout of 1842 had no further results came from the fact that the men were in part forced into it by the bourgeoisie, in part neither clear nor united as to

its object. But aside from this, they have shown their courage often enough when the matter in question was a specific social one. Not to mention the Welsh insurrection of 1839, a complete battle was waged in Manchester in May, 1843, during my residence there. Pauling & Henfrey, a brick firm, had increased the size of the bricks without raising wages, and sold the bricks, of course, at a higher price. The workers, to whom higher wages were refused, struck work, and the Brickmakers' Union declared war upon the firm. The firm, meanwhile, succeeded with great difficulty in securing hands from the neighbourhood, and among the knobsticks, against whom in the beginning intimidation was used; the proprietors set twelve men to guard the yard, all ex-soldiers and policemen, armed with guns. When intimidation proved unavailing, the brick-yard, which lay scarcely four hundred paces from an infantry barracks, was stormed at ten o'clock one night by a crowd of brickmakers, who advanced in military order, the first ranks armed with guns. They forced their way in, fired upon the watchmen as soon as they saw them, stamped out the wet bricks spread out to dry, tore down the piled-up rows of those already dry, demolished everything which came in their way, pressed into a building, where they destroyed the furniture and maltreated the wife of the overlooker who was living there. The watchmen, meanwhile, had placed themselves behind a hedge, whence they could fire safely and without interruption. The assailants stood before a burning brick-kiln, which threw a bright light upon them, so that every ball of their enemies struck home, while every one of their own shots missed its mark. Nevertheless, the firing lasted half-an-hour, until the ammunition was exhausted, and the object of the visit – the demolition of all the destructible objects in the yard – was attained. Then the military approached, and the brickmakers withdrew to Eccles, three miles from Manchester. A short time before reaching Eccles they held roll-call, and each man was called according to his number in the section when they separated, only to fall the more certainly into the hands of the police, who were approaching from all sides. The number of the wounded must have been very considerable, but those only could be counted who were arrested. One of these had received three bullets (in the thigh, the calf, and the shoulder), and had travelled in spite of them more than four miles on foot. These people have proved that they, too, possess revolutionary courage, and do not shun a rain of bullets. And when an unarmed multitude, without a precise aim common to them all, are held in check in a shut-off market-place, whose outlets are guarded by a couple of policemen and dragoons, as happened in 1842, this by no means proves a want of courage. On the contrary, the multitude would have stirred quite as little if the servants of public (i.e., of the bourgeois) order had not been present. Where the working-people have a specific end in view, they show courage enough; as, for instance, in the attack upon Birley's mill, which had later to be protected by artillery.

In this connection, a word or two as to the respect for the law in England. True, the law is sacred to the bourgeois, for it is his own composition, enacted with his consent, and for his benefit and protection. He knows that, even if an individual law should injure him, the whole fabric protects his interests; and more than all, the sanctity of the law, the sacredness of order as established by the active will of one part of society, and the passive acceptance of the other, is the strongest support of his social position. Because the English bourgeois finds himself reproduced in his law, as he does in his God, the policeman's truncheon which, in a certain measure, is his own club, has for him a wonderfully soothing power. But for the working-man quite otherwise! The working-man knows too well, has learned from too oft-repeated experience, that the law is a rod which the bourgeois has prepared for him; and when he is not compelled to do so, he never appeals to the law. It is ridiculous to assert that the English working-man fears the police, when every week in Manchester policemen are beaten, and last year an attempt was made to storm a station-house secured by iron doors and shutters. The power of the police in the turnout of 1842 lay, as I have already said, in the want of a clearly defined object on the part of the working-men themselves.

Since the working-men do not respect the law, but simply submit to its power when they cannot change it, it is most natural that they should at least propose alterations in it, that they should wish to put a proletarian law in the place of the legal fabric of the bourgeoisie. This proposed law is the People's Charter, which in form is purely political, and demands a democratic basis for the House of Commons. Chartism is the compact form of their opposition to the bourgeoisie. In the Unions and turnouts opposition always remained isolated: it was single working-men or sections who fought a single bourgeois. If the fight became general, this was scarcely by the intention of the working-men; or, when it did happen intentionally, Chartism was at the bottom of it. But in Chartism it is the whole working-class which arises against the bourgeoisie, and attacks, first of all, the political power, the legislative rampart with which the bourgeoisie has surrounded itself. Chartism has proceeded from the Democratic party which arose between 1780 and 1790 with and in the proletariat, gained strength during the French Revolution, and came forth after the peace as the Radical party. It had its headquarters then in Birmingham and Manchester, and later in London; extorted the Reform Bill from the Oligarchs of the old Parliament by a union with the Liberal bourgeoisie, and has steadily consolidated itself, since then, as a more and more pronounced working-men's party in opposition to the bourgeoisie. In 1838 a committee of the General Working-men's Association of London, with William Lovett at its head, drew up the People's Charter, whose six points are as follows: (1) Universal suffrage for every man who is of age, sane and unconvicted of crime; (2) Annual Parliaments; (3) Payment of members of Parliament, to enable poor men to stand for election; (4)

Voting by ballot to prevent bribery and intimidation by the bourgeoisie; (5) Equal electoral districts to secure equal representation; and (6) Abolition of the even now merely nominal property qualification of £300 in land for candidates in order to make every voter eligible. These six points, which are all limited to the reconstitution of the House of Commons, harmless as they seem, are sufficient to overthrow the whole English Constitution, Queen and Lords included. The so-called monarchical and aristocratic elements of the Constitution can maintain themselves only because the bourgeoisie has an interest in the continuance of their sham existence; and more than a sham existence neither possesses today. But as soon as real public opinion in its totality backs the House of Commons, as soon as the House of Commons incorporates the will, not of the bourgeoisie alone, but of the whole nation, it will absorb the whole power so completely that the last halo must fall from the head of the monarch and the aristocracy. The English working-man respects neither Lords nor Queen. The bourgeois, while in reality allowing them but little influence, yet offers to them personally a sham worship. The English Chartist is politically a republican, though he rarely or never mentions the word, while he sympathises with the republican parties of all countries, and calls himself in preference a democrat. But he is more than a mere republican, his democracy is not simply political.

Chartism was from the beginning of 1835 chiefly a movement among the working-men, though not yet sharply separated from the bourgeoisie. The Radicalism of the workers went hand in hand with the Radicalism of the bourgeoisie; the Charter was the shibboleth of both. They held their National Convention every year in common, seeming to be one party. The lower middle-class was just then in a very bellicose and violent state of mind in consequence of the disappointment over the Reform Bill and of the bad business years of 1837-1839, and viewed the boisterous Chartist agitation with a very favourable eye. Of the vehemence of this agitation no one in Germany has any idea. The people were called upon to arm themselves, were frequently urged to revolt; pikes were got ready, as in the French Revolution, and in 1838, one Stephens, a Methodist parson, said to the assembled working-people of Manchester:

“You have no need to fear the power of Government, the soldiers, bayonets, and cannon that are at the disposal of your oppressors; you have a weapon that is far mightier than all these, a weapon against which bayonets and cannon are powerless, and a child of ten years can wield it. You have only to take a couple of matches and a bundle of straw dipped in pitch, and I will see what the Government and its hundreds of thousands of soldiers will do against this one weapon if it is used boldly.”

As early as that year the peculiarly social character of the working-men's Chartism manifested itself. The same Stephens said, in a meeting of 200,000 men on Kersall Moor, the Mons Sacer of Manchester:

“Chartism, my friends, is no political movement, where the main point is your getting the ballot. Chartism is a knife and fork question: the Charter means a good house, good food and drink, prosperity, and short working-hours.”

The movements against the New Poor Law and for the Ten Hours' Bill were already in the closest relation to Chartism. In all the meetings of that time the Tory Oastler was active, and hundreds of petitions for improvements of the social conditions of the workers were circulated along with the national petition for the People's Charter adopted in Birmingham. In 1839 the agitation continued as vigorously as ever, and when it began to relax somewhat at the end of the year, Bussey, Taylor, and Frost hastened to call forth uprisings simultaneously in the North of England, in Yorkshire, and Wales. Frost's plan being betrayed, he was obliged to open hostilities prematurely. Those in the North heard of the failure of his attempt in time to withdraw. Two months later, in January, 1840, several so-called spy outbreaks took place in Sheffield and Bradford, in Yorkshire, and the excitement gradually subsided. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie turned its attention to more practical projects, more profitable for itself, namely the Corn Laws. The Anti-Corn-Law Association was formed in Manchester, and the consequence was a relaxation of the tie between the Radical bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The working-men soon perceived that for them the abolition of the Corn Laws could be of little use, while very advantageous to the bourgeoisie; and they could therefore not be won for the project.

The crisis of 1842 came on. Agitation was once more as vigorous as in 1839. But this time the rich manufacturing bourgeoisie, which was suffering severely under this particular crisis, took part in it. The Anti-Corn Law League, as it was now called, assumed a decidedly revolutionary tone. Its journals and agitators used undisguisedly revolutionary language, one very good reason for which was the fact that the Conservative party had been in power since 1841. As the Chartists had previously done, these bourgeois leaders called upon the people to rebel; and the working-men who had most to suffer from the crisis were not inactive, as the year's national petition for the Charter with its three and a half million signatures proves. In short, if the two Radical parties had been somewhat estranged, they allied themselves once more. At a meeting of Liberals and Chartists held in Manchester, February 14th, 1842, a petition urging the repeal of the Corn Laws and the adoption of the Charter was drawn up. The next day it was adopted by both parties. The spring and summer passed amidst violent agitation and increasing distress. The

bourgeoisie was determined to carry the repeal of the Corn Laws with the help of the crisis, the want which it entailed, and the general excitement. At this time, the Conservatives being in power, the Liberal bourgeoisie half abandoned their law-abiding habits; they wished to bring about a revolution with the help of the workers. The working-men were to take the chestnuts from the fire to save the bourgeoisie from burning their own fingers. The old idea of a "holy month," a general strike, broached in 1839 by the Chartists, was revived. This time, however, it was not the working-men who wished to quit work, but the manufacturers who wished to close their mills and send the operatives into the country parishes upon the property of the aristocracy, thus forcing the Tory Parliament and the Tory Ministry to repeal the Corn Laws. A revolt would naturally have followed, but the bourgeoisie stood safely in the background and could await the result without compromising itself if the worst came to the worst. At the end of July business began to improve; it was high time. In order not to lose the opportunity, three firms in Staleybridge reduced wages in spite of the improvement. Whether they did so of their own motion or in agreement with other manufacturers, especially those of the League, I do not know. Two withdrew after a time, but the third, William Bailey & Brothers, stood firm, and told the objecting operatives that "if this did not please them, they had better go and play a bit." This contemptuous answer the hands received with jeers. They left the mill, paraded through the town, and called upon all their fellows to quit work. In a few hours every mill stood idle, and the operatives marched to Mottram Moor to hold a meeting. This was on August 5th. August 8th they proceeded to Ashton and Hyde five thousand strong, closed all the mills and coal-pits, and held meetings, in which, however, the question discussed was not, as the bourgeoisie had hoped, the repeal of the Corn Laws, but, "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work." August 9th they proceeded to Manchester, unresisted by the authorities (all Liberals), and closed the mills; on the 11th they were in Stockport, where they met with the first resistance as they were storming the workhouse, the favourite child of the bourgeoisie. On the same day there was a general strike and disturbance in Bolton, to which the authorities here, too, made no resistance. Soon the uprising spread throughout the whole manufacturing district, and all employments, except harvesting and the production of food, came to a standstill. But the rebellious operatives were quiet. They were driven into this revolt without wishing it. The manufacturers, with the single exception of the Tory Birley, in Manchester, had, contrary to their custom, not opposed it. The thing had begun without the working-men's having any distinct end in view, for which reason they were all united in the determination not to be shot at for the benefit of the Corn Law repealing bourgeoisie. For the rest, some wanted to carry the Charter, others who thought this premature wished merely to secure the wages rate of 1840. On this point the whole insurrection was wrecked. If it had been from the beginning an intentional, determined working-men's insurrection, it would surely have carried its

point; but these crowds who had been driven into the streets by their masters, against their own will, and with no definite purpose, could do nothing. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie, which had not moved a finger to carry the alliance of February 15th into effect, soon perceived that the working-men did not propose to become its tools, and that the illogical manner in which it had abandoned its law-abiding standpoint threatened danger. It therefore resumed its law-abiding attitude, and placed itself upon the side of Government as against the working-men.

It swore in trusty retainers as special constables (the German merchants in Manchester took part in this ceremony, and marched in an entirely superfluous manner through the city with their cigars in their mouths and thick truncheons in their hands). It gave the command to fire upon the crowd in Preston, so that the unintentional revolt of the people stood all at once face to face, not only with the whole military power of the Government, but with the whole property-holding class as well. The working-men, who had no especial aim, separated gradually, and the insurrection came to an end without evil results. Later, the bourgeoisie was guilty of one shameful act after another, tried to whitewash itself by expressing a horror of popular violence by no means consistent with its own revolutionary language of the spring; laid the blame of insurrection upon Chartist instigators, whereas it had itself done more than all of them together to bring about the uprising; and resumed its old attitude of sanctifying the name of the law with a shamelessness perfectly unequalled. The Chartists, who were all but innocent of bringing about this uprising, who simply did what the bourgeoisie meant to do when they made the most of their opportunity, were prosecuted and convicted, while the bourgeoisie escaped without loss, and had, besides, sold off its old stock of goods with advantage during the pause in work.

The fruit of the uprising was the decisive separation of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie. The Chartists had not hitherto concealed their determination to carry the Charter at all costs, even that of a revolution; the bourgeoisie, which now perceived, all at once, the danger with which any violent change threatened its position, refused to hear anything further of physical force, and proposed to attain its end by moral force, as though this were anything else than the direct or indirect threat of physical force. This was one point of dissension, though even this was removed later by the assertion of the Chartists (who are at least as worthy of being believed as the bourgeoisie) that they, too, refrained from appealing to physical force. The second point of dissension and the main one, which brought Chartism to light in its purity, was the repeal of the Corn Laws. In this the bourgeoisie was directly interested, the proletariat not. The Chartists therefore divided into two parties whose political programmes agreed literally, but which were nevertheless thoroughly different and incapable of union. At the Birmingham National

Convention, in January, 1843, Sturge, the representative of the Radical bourgeoisie, proposed that the name of the Charter be omitted from the rules of the Chartist Association, nominally because this name had become connected with recollections of violence during the insurrection, a connection, by the way, which had existed for years, and against which Mr. Sturge had hitherto advanced no objection. The working-men refused to drop the name, and when Mr. Sturge was outvoted, that worthy Quaker suddenly became loyal, betook himself out of the hall, and founded a "Complete Suffrage Association" within the Radical bourgeoisie. So repugnant had these recollections become to the Jacobinical bourgeoisie, that he altered even the name Universal Suffrage into the ridiculous title, Complete Suffrage. The working-men laughed at him and quietly went their way.

From this moment Chartism was purely a working-men's cause freed from all bourgeois elements. The "Complete" journals, the Weekly Dispatch, Weekly Chronicle, Examiner, etc., fell gradually into the sleepy tone of the other Liberal sheets, espoused the cause of Free Trade, attacked the Ten Hours' Bill and all exclusively working-men's demands, and let their Radicalism as a whole fall rather into the background. The Radical bourgeoisie joined hands with the Liberals against the working-men in every collision, and in general made the Corn Law question, which for the English is the Free Trade question, their main business. They thereby fell under the dominion of the Liberal bourgeoisie, and now play a most pitiful role.

The Chartist working-men, on the contrary, espoused with redoubled zeal all the struggles of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. Free competition has caused the workers suffering enough to be hated by them; its apostles, the bourgeoisie, are their declared enemies. The working-man has only disadvantages to await from the complete freedom of competition. The demands hitherto made by him, the Ten Hours' Bill, protection of the workers against the capitalist, good wages, a guaranteed position, repeal of the New Poor Law, all of the things which belong to Chartism quite as essentially as the "Six Points," are directly opposed to free competition and Free Trade. No wonder, then, that the working-men will not hear of Free Trade and the repeal of the Corn Laws (a fact incomprehensible to the whole English bourgeoisie), and while at least wholly indifferent to the Corn Law question, are most deeply embittered against its advocates. This question is precisely the point at which the proletariat separates from the bourgeoisie, Chartism from Radicalism; and the bourgeois understanding cannot comprehend this, because it cannot comprehend the proletariat.

Therein lies the difference between Chartist democracy and all previous political bourgeois democracy. Chartism is of an essentially social nature, a class movement. The "Six Points" which for the Radical bourgeois are the beginning and end of the

matter, which are meant, at the utmost, to call forth certain further reforms of the Constitution, are for the proletariat a mere means to further ends. "Political power our means, social happiness our end," is now the clearly formulated war-cry of the Chartists. The "knife and fork question" of the preacher Stephens was a truth for a part of the Chartists only, in 1838; it is a truth for all of them in 1845. There is no longer a mere politician among the Chartists, and even though their Socialism is very little developed, though their chief remedy for poverty has hitherto consisted in the land-allotment system, which was superseded by the introduction of manufacture, though their chief practical propositions are apparently of a reactionary nature, yet these very measures involve the alternative that they must either succumb to the power of competition once more and restore the old state of things, or they must themselves entirely overcome competition and abolish it. On the other hand, the present indefinite state of Chartism, the separation from the purely political party, involves that precisely the characteristic feature, its social aspect, will have to be further developed. The approach to Socialism cannot fail, especially when the next crisis directs the working-men by force of sheer want to social instead of political remedies. And a crisis must follow the present active state of industry and commerce in 1847 at the latest, and probably in 1846; one, too, which will far exceed in extent and violence all former crises. The working-men will carry their Charter, naturally; but meanwhile they will learn to see clearly with regard to many points which they can make by means of it and of which they now know very little.

Meanwhile the Socialist agitation also goes forward. English Socialism comes under our consideration so far only as it affects the working-class. The English Socialists demand the gradual introduction of possession in common in home colonies embracing two to three thousand persons who shall carry on both agriculture and manufacture and enjoy equal rights and equal education. They demand greater facility of obtaining divorce, the establishment of a rational government, with complete freedom of conscience and the abolition of punishment, the same to be replaced by a rational treatment of the offender. These are their practical measures, their theoretical principles do not concern us here. English Socialism arose with Owen, a manufacturer, and proceeds therefore with great consideration toward the bourgeoisie and great injustice toward the proletariat in its methods, although it culminates in demanding the abolition of the class antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat.

The Socialists are thoroughly tame and peaceable, accept our existing order, bad as it is, so far as to reject all other methods but that of winning public opinion. Yet they are so dogmatic that success by this method is for them, and for their principles as at present formulated, utterly hopeless. While bemoaning the demoralisation of the

lower classes, they are blind to the element of progress in this dissolution of the old social order, and refuse to acknowledge that the corruption wrought by private interests and hypocrisy in the property-holding class is much greater. They acknowledge no historic development, and wish to place the nation in a state of Communism at once, overnight, not by the unavoidable march of its political development up to the point at which this transition becomes both possible and necessary. They understand, it is true, why the working-man is resentful against the bourgeois, but regard as unfruitful this class hatred, which is, after all, the only moral incentive by which the worker can be brought nearer the goal. They preach instead, a philanthropy and universal love far more unfruitful for the present state of England. They acknowledge only a psychological development, a development of man in the abstract, out of all relation to the Past, whereas the whole world rests upon that Past, the individual man included. Hence they are too abstract, too metaphysical, and accomplish little. They are recruited in part from the working-class, of which they have enlisted but a very small fraction representing, however, its most educated and solid elements. In its present form, Socialism can never become the common creed of the working-class; it must condescend to return for a moment to the Chartist standpoint. But the true proletarian Socialism having passed through Chartism, purified of its bourgeois elements, assuming the form which it has already reached in the minds of many Socialists and Chartist leaders (who are nearly all Socialists), must, within a short time, play a weighty part in the history of the development of the English people. English Socialism, the basis of which is much more ample than that of the French, is behind it in theoretical development, will have to recede for a moment to the French standpoint in order to proceed beyond it later. Meanwhile the French, too, will develop farther. English Socialism affords the most pronounced expression of the prevailing absence of religion among the working-men, an expression so pronounced indeed that the mass of the working-men, being unconsciously and merely practically irreligious, often draw back before it. But here, too, necessity will force the working-men to abandon the remnants of a belief which, as they will more and more clearly perceive, serves only to make them weak and resigned to their fate, obedient and faithful to the vampire property-holding class.

Hence it is evident that the working-men's movement is divided into two sections, the Chartists and the Socialists. The Chartists are theoretically the more backward, the less developed, but they are genuine proletarians all over, the representatives of their class. The Socialists are more far-seeing, propose practical remedies against distress, but, proceeding originally from the bourgeoisie, are for this reason unable to amalgamate completely with the working-class. The union of Socialism with Chartism, the reproduction of French Communism in an English manner, will be the next step, and has already begun. Then only, when this has been achieved, will the

working-class be the true intellectual leader of England. Meanwhile, political and social development will proceed, and will foster this new party, this new departure of Chartism.

These different sections of working-men, often united, often separated, Trades Unionists, Chartists, and Socialists, have founded on their own hook numbers of schools and reading-rooms for the advancement of education. Every Socialist, and almost every Chartist institution, has such a place, and so too have many trades. Here the children receive a purely proletarian education, free from all the influences of the bourgeoisie; and, in the reading-rooms, proletarian journals and books alone, or almost alone, are to be found. These arrangements are very dangerous for the bourgeoisie, which has succeeded in withdrawing several such institutes, "Mechanics' Institutes," from proletarian influences, and making them organs for the dissemination of the sciences useful to the bourgeoisie. Here the natural sciences are now taught, which may draw the working-men away from the opposition to the bourgeoisie, and perhaps place in their hands the means of making inventions which bring in money for the bourgeoisie; while for the working-man the acquaintance with the natural sciences is utterly useless now when it too often happens that he never gets the slightest glimpse of Nature in his large town with his long working-hours..Here Political Economy is preached, whose idol is free competition, and whose sum and substance for the working-man is this, that he cannot do anything more rational than resign himself to starvation. Here all education is tame, flabby, subservient to the ruling politics and religion, so that for the working-man it is merely a constant sermon upon quiet obedience, passivity, and resignation to his fate.

The mass of working-men naturally have nothing to do with these institutes, and betake themselves to the proletarian reading-rooms and to the discussion of matters which directly concern their own interests, whereupon the self-sufficient bourgeoisie says its *Dixi et salvavi*, and turns with contempt from a class which "prefers the angry ranting of ill-meaning demagogues to the advantages of solid education." That, however, the working-men appreciate solid education when they can get it unmixed with the interested cant of the bourgeoisie, the frequent lectures upon scientific, aesthetic, and economic subjects prove which are delivered especially in the Socialist institutes, and very well attended. I have often heard working-men, whose fustian jackets scarcely held together, speak upon geological, astronomical, and other subjects, with more knowledge than most "cultivated" bourgeois in Germany possess. And in how great a measure the English proletariat has succeeded in attaining independent education is shown especially by the fact that the epoch-making products of modern philosophical, political, and poetical literature are read by working-men almost exclusively. The bourgeois, enslaved by

social conditions and the prejudices involved in them, trembles, blesses, and crosses himself before everything which really paves the way for progress; the proletarian has open eyes for it, and studies it with pleasure and success. In this respect the Socialists, especially, have done wonders for the education of the proletariat. They have translated the French materialists, Helvetius, Holbach, Diderot, etc., and disseminated them, with the best English works, in cheap editions. Strauss' Life of Jesus and Proudhon's Property also circulate among the working-men only. Shelley, the genius, the prophet, Shelley, and Byron, with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society, find most of their readers in the proletariat; the bourgeoisie owns only castrated editions, family editions, cut down in accordance with the hypocritical morality of today. The two great practical philosophers of latest date, Bentham and Godwin, are, especially the latter, almost exclusively the property of the proletariat; for though Bentham has a school within the Radical bourgeoisie, it is only the proletariat and the Socialists who have succeeded in developing his teachings a step forward. The proletariat has formed upon this basis a literature, which consists chiefly of journals and pamphlets, and is far in advance of the whole bourgeois literature in intrinsic worth. On this point more later.

One more point remains to be noticed. The factory operatives, and especially those of the cotton district, form the nucleus of the labour movement. Lancashire, and especially Manchester, is the seat of the most powerful Unions, the central point of Chartism, the place which numbers most Socialists. The more the factory system has taken possession of a branch of industry, the more the working-men employed in it participate in the labour movement; the sharper the opposition between working-men and capitalists, the clearer the proletarian consciousness in the working-men. The small masters of Birmingham, though they suffer from the crises, still stand upon an unhappy middle ground between proletarian Chartism and shopkeepers' Radicalism. But, in general, all the workers employed in manufacture are won for one form or the other of resistance to capital and bourgeoisie; and all are united upon this point, that they, as working-men, a title of which they are proud, and which is the usual form of address in Chartist meetings, form a separate class, with separate interests and principles, with a separate way of looking at things in contrast with that of all property-owners; and that in this class reposes the strength and the capacity of development of the nation.

NOTES

1 "What kind of wild justice must it be in the hearts of these men that prompts them, with cold deliberation, in conclave assembled, to doom their brother workman, as the deserter of his order and his order's cause. to die as a traitor and

deserter; and have him executed, since not by any public judge and hangman, then by a private one; – like your old Chivalry *Femgericht*, and Secret-Tribunal, suddenly in this strange guise become new; suddenly rising once more on the astonished eye, dressed now not in mail-shirts, but in fustian jackets, meeting not in Westphalian forests but in the paved Gallowgate of Glasgow!... Such temper must be widespread, virulent among the many, when even in its worst acme, it can take such a form in a few.” – Carlyle, Chartism, p. 40.– Note by Engels.

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